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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to examine an approach to assessing educational needs for school board members, superintendents, and principals and to do that in a way that counteracts the remarkable amount of trivia that has been written on this particular topic. The EASI instrument--Educational Administration Skills Inventory--was used to produce importance/performance data on 14 administrative activities and 16 behavioral skill dimensions. The paper describes, in broad terms, a statewide study to establish importance/performance gaps representing training needs for board members, superintendents, and principals. The model made it possible to recognize areas of greatest need, as well as the particular skills that tend to be associated with that administrative activity. Finally, suggestions were provided for translating the combination of activities and skills into developmental programs for each group, based on the precise data produced. (Author)

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Needs Assessment for Administrator Training--
As If You Were Serious!

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Needs Assessment for Administrator Training--
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Abstract

The purpose of this paper was to examine an approach to assessing educational needs for school board members, superintendents, and principals, and to do that in a way that counteracts the remarkable amount of trivia that has been written on this particular topic.

The EASI instrument--Educational Administration Skills Inventory--was used to produce importance/performance data on fourteen administrative activities and sixteen behavioral skill dimensions.

The paper describes, in broad terms, a state-wide study to establish importance/performance gaps representing training needs for board members, superintendents, and principals. The model made it possible to recognize areas of greatest need, as well as the particular skills that tend to be associated with that administrative activity.

Finally, suggestions were provided for translating the combination of activities and skills into developmental programs for each group, based on the precise data produced.

Needs Assessment for Administrator Training--
As If You Were Serious!

Of Needs, Activities, and Skills.

The earliest use of the term "needs assessment" was connected with federal grant programs. The response to these first demands that proposals include an assessment of needs was a collection of authoritative letters supporting the proposed project. To this day, that habit remains intact! The most recent proposal that we examined did, indeed, include a collection of such letters--in spite of the fact that all of us recognize these nice, supportive epistles as merely courtesies that organizations share with each other.

Other approaches to needs assessment have taken many forms, but most often have focused on attitudes toward the study of a particular topic: whether the potential students (or the community) prefer one subject or another or whether one person sees special needs for someone else. The outome, especially for inservice efforts, is usually a topic or topics that were selected because "...I heard a good speaker at my last convention..." or "...this must be great because everybody's doing it..."

A far better approach would seem to be one in which there is 'real' data concerning the client (a person or a group), one in which that data is analyzed to produce genuine

learning needs of the client, and one in which the analysis of data has direct implications for the design of training programs for the client.

To that end we adapted an idiographic learning model (Laten and Katz, 1975/1978) to serve both individuals and groups, involving these five steps:

1. A description of the job environment.
2. Performance expectations for the job-holders.
3. Behavioral descriptions of an individual's performance or a compilation of a group's performance.
4. An analysis of the data.
5. A set of reasonable expectations or program recommendations for groups or individuals.

To use this model, the job environment was defined by preselection of the job categories, the region, and demographic data provided by respondents. Job expectations were provided by "importance" ratings on fourteen administrative activities and sixteen behavioral skill dimensions. Performance ratings were provided by perceptions of "performance" of specific persons on the same activities and on forty-three behaviors, the behaviors keyed to skills. The data were compiled on the basis of groups in order to translate the information into usable programs.

Several assumptions underlie this approach to identifying and understanding performance needs:

1. Changes in the environment, or in the job, change both the opportunity and the need for particular behaviors.
2. Significant gaps between "importance" and "performance" suggest appropriate areas of need.
3. Behavioral items within an instrument or to be observed should be those clearly associated in the literature with particular skill dimensions.
4. Behavioral items that consistently tend to be associated with the effective performance of job activities represent legitimate additions to program designs.
5. The data collected and the method of analysis to determine needs should have specific instructional implications.

EASI--The Instrument.

The Educational Administration Skills Inventory was developed by the authors and Ray L. Calabrese. EASI is based on one hundred items of information. Eight items ask demographic information about the respondent; five ask for demographic information about the person identified for performance estimates. The remaining items ask each respondent to rate the importance of a particular behavioral skill dimension with reference to a particular administrative position: board member, superintendent, or principal. The

rating categories employed a 7 point Likert-type scale. He/she was then asked to rate the importance of fourteen activities with reference to a specific position. The instrument then asks that the performance of a specific person in that district be rated on the basis of performance of each activity. The last part of the instrument asks for a rating of that person's performance on forty-three specific behaviors, each keyed by definition and usage to a behavioral skill dimension.

The major portion of the activity items are those identified by the National Association of Secondary School Principals as the primary activity categories associated with the principalship (McCleary and Thompson, 1979). Added to that list were several additional activities listed by the American Association of School Administrators (Hoyle, English, and Steffy, 1985). The combined lists form a set of appropriate activities for all school administrative posts, including board members. Higher ratings of importance should define appropriate activities for each job category.

The section of the instrument dealing with activities is illustrated in Table 1. Respondents had already marked

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Insert Table 1 about here

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these items in terms of "importance". The numbers '10' and '11' are keyed to particular computer column numbers. In addition to principals, superintendents and board members

were included for needs study.

Twelve of the sixteen skill dimensions were adapted from those used by NASSP in a national program of assessment centers for the selection of school principals. These include problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, leadership, sensitivity, decisiveness, range of interests, personal motivation, educational values, stress tolerance, oral communication, and written communication. Definitions were adapted to reflect the limitations of instruments with behaviorally defined items. Four skill dimensions often associated with school administrative jobs were added: conflict management, political astuteness, risk taking, and creativity. Of the forty-three behaviors assessed with a semantic differential scale, all were selected as the primary behaviors associated with particular skill dimensions--two, three, or four items keyed to each dimension.

The semantic differential items representing behaviors is illustrated in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

As you can identify, these items are widely separated within the instrument (because of the column numbers again) and they are the three items keyed to problem analysis. To arrive at a rating for problem analysis, the middle item is reversed (to provide parallel implications) and the scores on the three items are averaged. Internal validity (reliability and

content validity) of the EASI instrument has been well established (below); predictive, or criterion-related, validity needs more field-testing. Preliminary data, however, strongly suggests that the combining of behavior ratings to form skill ratings may be a valuable concept.

During development, fifteen persons were selected as experts in the area of school administration or in the operation of NASSP assessment centers to review the instrument. There was no rejection of items and none were recommended to be added to either the activities or specific behaviors sections of the instrument. Suggestions were made for improved wording of nine items, and this was done. The fifteen persons included a State Commissioner of Education, a Dean of a College of Education, three directors of regional assessment centers, three university professors of educational administration, three superintendents, and four principals.

After these changes, the EASI instrument was presented to two groups of graduate students in educational administration, a total of thirty-five participants. These volunteers were teachers preparing to become school administrators. They were asked to complete the instrument in relation to the job of the principalship and to provide performance ratings for their current, or most recent, principal. They, too, were asked to comment on the content of the items (although not on the assignment to skills). As a result, fifteen items were changed in wording, but none

were added or deleted. Reliability scales met the standards selected, with better-than-expected results.

An EASI Study.

After field-testing, the instrument was used as the basis of a state-wide study to identify the training needs of board members, superintendents, and principals. The methods included a strict sampling procedure and a fairly complex statistical handling. Analysis of the data also included break-outs for small schools/large schools and younger/older administrators. There were too few female or minority respondents for analysis. The needs of the three groups, without the detail in the original study, are illustrated in Table 3. The study identified the particular skills that

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Insert Table 3 about here

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tend to accompany particular activities, as well as the activity and skill needs for several subgroups. The section of Table 3 identified as "Other Needs..." was based on several findings, but usually represented the perceptions of other groups.

The Basis of Program.

The study also included ideas of how to use the activities/skills data in the design of programs, with primary emphasis on selecting topics based upon activity needs, and simulations (focusing on those topics) with the capability of illustrating skills. For instance, if you are

working with an individual or a group with deficiencies in the area of school climate, the associated skills are range of interests and sensitivity. You might then develop an instructional program based on the topics appropriate to school climate. Sensitivity can be illustrated very well in written tasks (in-baskets, for instance), in one-on-two group activities (conflicts, for instance), or in group settings. Range of interests is very difficult to measure in a simulated setting, but can be examined by the breadth of topics in which the participant demonstrates some expertise.

To complete the instructional design, you would choose pertinent and current topics based on school climate, choose activities that could illustrate particular skills, and combine those ideas into a unified program design.

What's Next?

During the summer of 1987, the authors conducted a workshop which was designed to improve administrative performance based on activities and skills identified as representing both individual and group needs. The basis of data was a self-assessment instrument--derived from EASI--with recommendations for each participant, as well as recommendations for the group as a whole. This new instrument--MAPS for Measuring Administrative Performance Skills--will take advantage of the EASI concepts for both self-assessment and for administrative evaluation.

The workshop has not been produced as a package, because of the trial-and-error nature of the effort and subsequent

limitations related to time. It is possible, however, to suggest several "rules" related to this instructional approach:

1. Students are impressed with the accuracy of detailed analysis of their skills, and will work extremely hard to improve them when the analysis is convincing. This, alone, is a refreshing departure from the you-must-accept-me-as-I-am arguments.
2. Training for performance must be very, very direct. One is--in reality--teaching acting skills instead of concepts or information. Both the teachers and the taught have difficulty in changing the habits of a lifetime. Once the need to change is clearly established and the focus is on specific behaviors, progress is immediate and impressive.
3. An effective approach to improving leadership skills lies in assigning a monitor to each participant in a group with instructions to interrupt for a caucus. The monitor's task is to provide political analysis, identifying opportunities for coalitions, identifying opportunities for closure of topics as well as the session, and reminding the participant to exhibit particular skills.

4. Improving performance on specific administrative activities remains an unsolved problem. It is helpful to practice role-playing activities using activities or topics identified by needs assessment, however, one is still basing instruction on expanding the student's information base. There is an obvious need to provide direct, behavior-based instruction on the activity, preceded by practice on those skill dimensions that tend to be consistently associated with effective performance on each activity. From the standpoint of diagnostic/prescriptive teaching, it seems appropriate to expand the model described earlier to include performance on skill dimensions as prerequisite skills and performance on a particular job activity as the current teaching task.

[If you will agree to observe our copyright restrictions of providing credit with your use of the EASI instrument, we will send a single copy with instructions in exchange for a self-addressed envelope. MAPS will be marketed when field-testing is complete. The address is EASI, Box 123, WSU,

Wichita, Ks 67208.]

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Table 1.

Sample portion of EASI: Activities.

PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Please circle the number (from 1 to 7) that represents your estimate of this person's performance level. The mid-score, (4), should reflect an average--but completely acceptable--performance for a principal.

MY VIEW OF THIS PERSON'S PERFORMANCE

		Poor						Outstanding
Developing Curriculum	10.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Supervising Instruction	11.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Table 2.

Sample portion of EASI: Behaviors.

ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIORS

The following semantic differential items refer to extremes of specified or implied behaviors of this person's on-the-job performance. Please circle the number (from 1 to 7) that is closest to the typical behavior of this person during this school year. There is no special order and some items have been reversed to avoid scoring implications.

Acts without needed data	24.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Seeks additional information
Analyzes information	28.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Accepts information as given
Recognizes important issues	44.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Unaware of important issues

Table 3.

Training Needs for Kansas Administrators (Douglas and Johnson, 1986).

Board Members	Superintendents	Principals
ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES NEEDING IMPROVEMENT		
	Curriculum Dev.	Curriculum Dev.
		Supervision of Instruction
	Program Eval..	Program Eval.
		Staff Eval.
	Staff Dev.	Staff Dev.
School Climate	School Climate	School Climate
Budget Dev.	Community Rel.	
Long-Range Plnng.	Long-Range Plnng.	
Other Needs Identified for Each Group		
Program Eval.		Staff Selection
School Climate		Long-Range Plnng.
Staff Dev.		
PERFORMANCE SKILLS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT		
Judgment	Judgment	Judgment
Stress Tolerance	Stress Tolerance	Stress Tolerance
Oral Communication	Oral Communication	Oral Communication
Risk Taking	Risk Taking	Risk Taking
		Creativity
Decisiveness	Decisiveness	Org. Ability

Other Needs Identified for Each Group

Sensitivity	Sensitivity	Leadership
Creativity	Conflict Mgt.	Conflict Mgt.
Political Astute.	Political Astute.	Decisiveness
Ed. Values		